United Nations E/CN.6/2008/NGO/18

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
18 December 2007

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-second session
25 February-7 March 2008
Item 3 (a) (i) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women

Statement submitted by Christian Children's Fund, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2008/1.

07-64990 (E) 170108

Statement

Inclusion of girls affected by armed forces or groups in non-discriminatory demobilization, disarmament and reintegration program financing

The theme of the fifty-second session of the Commission, "Financing for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women," presents an opportunity for addressing the reintegration needs and concerns of girls, who are or have been associated with armed forces and groups, through an empowerment approach.

We recognize the greater international awareness and attention being given to the needs of children recruited and exploited by armed forces and groups. We commend efforts by the Office of the Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF, and civil society in their advocacy for these children, particularly for girls. We are encouraged by the development of international standards and institutions such as the Optional Protocol on Children and Armed Conflict, Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and the Paris Principles: Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups.

However, we remain concerned that little attention has been focused on the special needs and concerns of girls affected by armed forces and groups. Their presence is overlooked in conflict and post-conflict situations, even though the girl child is the most vulnerable entity, not only because of her age, but also due to her higher risk of experiencing gender discrimination, gender-based violence, and social stigmatization.

As nations transition into peace processes, girls face new challenges. Due to severe and consistent lack of girl child inclusive and gender appropriate demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) programs, many girls remain isolated and unable to reintegrate into their societies. As funding is regularly allotted for males within the pre-existing mechanisms of DDR, girls are systematically isolated from vital support systems, such as livelihood support, skills training, and mental health and psychosocial support.

Their isolation goes hand in hand with their invisibility, stemming from the stigma associated with girls' recruitment. The girl soldier remains hidden, partly due to the fact that her role as a soldier is varied and unrecognized. Her roles may include: armed fighter, combat trainer, spy, informant, wife forced into forced marriage, sex slave, nurse, looter, messenger, and food gatherer/cook. Girls who fill these roles remain invisible to governments, UN entities, and NGOs, though it should be presumed that the girl soldier exists in all armed conflicts. Because formerly recruited girls are so badly stigmatized, it is essential to create program supports that do not add to their stigma. In some situations, it can be harmful to identify formerly recruited girls. Girls' reintegration cannot be done in a 'one size fits all' model. Rather, reintegration approaches must be flexible and tailored to fit the local context.

Often, the definition of girls affected by armed forces and groups excludes refugees, internally displaced persons, and girls who witnessed or were victims of gender-based violence and other war-related atrocities. Reintegration supports become discriminatory and divisive when they are extended only to girls who had been recruited. It is important to extend appropriate supports to all girls affected by armed conflict, regardless of whether they had been recruited. Health care and services are pivotal to the full reintegration of girls affected by conflict into their societies. Many girl soldiers and girls affected by armed conflict suffer from HIV/AIDS and post-pregnancy and other reproductive health issues. Without the inclusion of gender-based health care and education for girls in DDR programming, girls are unable to fully integrate into society and become productive mothers, citizens, and promoters of peace.

Traditional DDR programs have sometimes prevented the protection and gender development needs of girls affected by fighting forces. Even when access to rehabilitation programs is available to girls, many girls avoid them because of their public nature and resulting ostracization and isolation from other children and the community. Many girls also refrain from joining traditional DDR programs due to age and gender insensitive environments. Though steps have been taken to improve DDR processes — such as DPKO's establishment of child protection officers in UN missions and the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), calling for greater incorporation of a gender perspective in peacekeeping operations and DDR — this progress calls for better implementation and monitoring mechanisms during conflict and in DDR processes to ensure that financing is bestowed upon efforts for girls as well as boys. Governments, UN agencies, and NGOs need to ensure that DDR processes and programs address girl soldiers' gender-specific and highly sensitive needs, both during and post conflict, and gender specification in formal DDR processes.

The Paris Principles, aimed at preventing the recruitment and use of child soldiers and offering mechanisms for their sustainable reintegration into their societies, outline the need for gender representation in DDR processes. These include:

> *"From the planning stage onwards, through the design of eligibility criteria and screening procedures for inclusion in release and reintegration programs and informal release processes through to programming for reintegration, monitoring and follow-up, actors should recognize that girls are at risk of being 'invisible' and take measures to ensure that girls are included and relevant issues addressed at all stages."*
> (Paris Principles, paragraph 40)

> *"Peace agreements should include specific provision for the needs of children, including the particular needs of girls and any children they have or will have as a result of their association with an armed force or armed group. Such provision should explicitly include financial and other resources required for programs to support the swift and safe release."*
> (Paris Principles, paragraph 7.12)

> *"Life skills programming should be sensitive to the particular challenges faced by girls upon reintegration."*
> (Paris Principles, paragraph 7.83.7)

> *"Families may expect girls to provide an income, which may result in them being sexually exploited. Girls need to be protected from such exploitation through advocacy with communities, educational and vocational skills training and the provision of alternative economic strategies."*
> (Paris Principles, paragraph 7.64)

Implementing the recommendations of the Paris Principles requires reforming traditional DDR programs to include programs for girl soldiers and other girls affected by conflict, including the sustainable integration of girls into their societies with the aid of financing for gender development and empowerment. A commitment to financing such reintegration should include the following:

- Funding must be structured and focused on DDR for girl soldiers. Steps must be taken to allocate financing, at least, proportionally to the number of girls represented in fighting forces and affected by armed conflict. Provisions should be made for girl mothers and their children, who often suffer a double stigma.

- Gender-based financing must be coupled with gender-appropriate programs, which should be implemented in a manner which ensures that financing is being utilized as advantageously as possible and that the girls are being fully and comprehensively reintegrated into their communities. To be effective, funding must be flexible and long-term. Too often, reintegration funding is structured in one-year tranches.

- Gender equity must be maintained, which includes not just financing, but also how the funds are spent and utilized on girls in their communities.

- DDR programming for girls should include culturally appropriate livelihood support, which is essential in avoiding sexual exploitation and enabling girls to achieve positive roles in society.

- Health-care and other health-related services are pivotal to the full reintegration of girls into their societies. Without the inclusion of gender-based health care and education programmes for girls in DDR, including psychosocial support, HIV/AIDS counselling and treatment, and education, girls will be unable to fully integrate into society.

- Children and youth, particularly girls, should be a part of peace processes in post-conflict countries and should play an active and meaningful role in the formation of relevant programming and policy implementation.

- Governments, with the assistance of UN agencies and NGOs, should establish, implement and mainstream girl-friendly programming and policies in all spheres of society, such as education, livelihoods, and health.

- Multi-sectoral, community-based and traditional mechanisms of protection should be utilized and supported to ensure and encourage the reintegration of girls in such mechanisms. Effective protection is needed to avoid re-recruitment and other forms of exploitation and to ensure the fulfilment of girls' rights. Community engagement is vital because, ultimately, reintegration is a community as well as individual process.

- Reintegration efforts should be accompanied by wider efforts to support women and girls' empowerment and gender equity at a societal level.